

# The Sacraments

Baptism

# What is a sacrament?

“A sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, in which by sensible *signs* the grace of God in Christ is represented, *sealed*, and applied to believers, and they, in turn, express their faith and obedience to God”

-- Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Theology*

# What is a sacrament?

- How is this different from the Roman Catholic view?
- Is the word 'ordinance' preferable?

# Abraham and Circumcision

**Genesis 17:11** You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

**Romans 4:11** He received the *sign* of circumcision as a *seal* of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

# The Meaning and Logic of Circumcision

“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn” (Deuteronomy 10:16)

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deuteronomy 30:6)

“Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds” (Jeremiah 4:4).

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh—” (Jeremiah 9:25).

# The Meaning and Logic of Circumcision

“For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup> For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup> But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart...” (Romans 2:25-29).

# The Meaning and Logic of Circumcision

“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—” (Philippians 3:3)

“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:11-12)

# What Does Baptism *Signify*?

- Cleansing or Purification (Titus 3:5; Heb 10:22; cf. Ezek 35:26-27)
- Discipleship to Christ (Matt 28:19)
- Identification with Christ; “a naming ceremony” (‘into the name...’ Acts 2:38; 8:16)
- Faith in Christ and Repentance (Acts 2:38; 8:37-38)
- Entrance into the Visible Church (1 Cor 12:13)



# The Meaning of Baptism: *Identified with Christ; Heirs of Abraham*

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” — <sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith... For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:13-14, 27-29).

# The Logic of Baptism:

## *Commanded to Repent and Believe*

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup> Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup> Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:1-4).

# The Subjects of Baptism: Biblical Truths

- The symbolism points to salvation, which is a gift from God. Passive reception (baptism is done *to you*, not *by you*) reflects this.
- Baptism is the beginning of what is supposed to be lifelong discipleship to Jesus Christ and repentance from sin (Rom 6).
- The covenant sign of the OT pointed to realities of salvation but was administered to (male) children. Our salvation is still linked to that covenant, but circumcision has been done away with. (Gal 3:15-18; Heb 6:13-18).
- Baptism is placed in parallel with circumcision (Col 2:11-12 – “You were also circumcised...having been buried with him in baptism...”)
- Jesus explicitly says that children are a part of His kingdom and should be received by His disciples (Matt 19:14).
- The presence of one committed believing parent makes the children of that parent “set apart” (1 Cor 7:14).

# The Subjects of Baptism: Biblical Examples

**“And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ...<sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” – Acts 2:38-39**

“And after she was baptized, and her household as well...” – Acts 16:15a

“And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.” – Acts 16:33

“(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)” – 1 Corinthians 1:16

# Westminster Shorter Catechism on Baptism

Q. 165. *What is baptism?*

A. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be a sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit; of adoption, and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's.

Q. 166. *Unto whom is baptism to be administered?*

A. Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.

Q. 167. *How is baptism to be improved by us?*

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.